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AI Text Processing Sparks New Phase Of Travel Management Productivity

By Jay Campbell • November 2, 2023

Travel management companies using [Amgine Technologies](#) and communications tech firms like Front have entered a new era of productivity.

Travel Incorporated is processing between five and 10 bookings initiated by traveler emails this way for every standard agent-assisted booking.

Newer Amgine clients Christopherson Business Travel and Executive Travel are excited about the potential. All three travel management companies are Travelport users, but Amgine also serves Sabre shops. Its other TMC clients include Internova's Altour, Atlas Travel & Technology Group and National Travel Service.

“Instead of travelers having to wait one to four hours to receive a response to trip requests via email, they get a response within 10 minutes with curated travel options and have a similar experience to booking their travel on an online booking tool,” according to Amgine president and CEO Greg Apple.

Amgine uses proprietary, pattern-based artificial intelligence to interpret text from email, SMS, web form or chatbot. It can

also read screenshots. Understanding what the traveler wants, it does some searching and sends options to an agent. Using an Amgine interface, they confirm it's in policy and might pause to apply an unused ticket. (They can also add a cost center code or reason code for reporting.) They can then click a button to book it in the GDS or email options back to the traveler. If the traveler picks one, it goes straight to ticketing. If they take too long to respond, and fares may no longer be valid, it goes back to an agent. The process may differ by client or TMC.

On the front end, communications platforms help read and clean up emails. Amgine partners with Front, Genesys Cloud, Mitel, RingCentral and Salesforce.

“Amgine is the AI engine powering trips, bookings and options for the end user, and they're reducing the back-and-forth necessary between the agent and end user,” said Front VP of partnerships and business development Craig Klemp. “That's complementary for customers using Front because we're the content powering their AI. We bring in the emails. On the flip side, where the communication goes back to the user, we can streamline and ‘templatize’ the communications.”

Front helps manage email volume and reduce service issues when an agent is off duty and customer communication otherwise falls through the cracks. It retains history and prior communications for others to review.



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"Another piece is the lack of visibility into customer metrics: response time and SLAs around that," said Klemp. "There's a fog on what their ability to service is." Realtime visibility into team performance, capacity, response times and SLA attainment allows TMCs to hold their teams and customers accountable with data that can serve as a check on traveler claims about long wait times.

Front has over 8,500 business clients, 100 of which are in travel, including more than 20 TMCs.

Leveraging texting or email to improve [agent efficiency](#) has obvious potential on its own but also addresses TMCs' needs to stay competitive and manage the ongoing problem of [finding talent](#).

"We see the ROI in three buckets: cost savings, increased productivity and reduced use of other solutions," said Klemp. "We've seen up to \$3 million-plus in savings for travel companies. They

achieve an average of 1.5 times faster response times compared with prior benchmarks. And we've seen headcount avoidance of up to 45 percent."

The model also puts online booking tools on notice.

"I think it's about variety," said Josh Cameron, Christopherson Business Travel's chief strategy officer, when asked how these messaging-based options could rival online booking tools. "Some of this comes down to customers. With Deem or Concur, there's onboarding. It takes a little time to get into the tool, even if you're using single sign-on, etc. It still takes effort to log in and navigate. So you introduce something like Amgine, well, now it's easy. You don't need to be trained at all, and you're immediately in policy."

CBT is a Front user and has been piloting Amgine.

"We're now just trying to figure out exactly how to roll it out," said Cameron. "We intend to use this type of tool heavily. It's less about internal efficiency than it is about making it more efficient for the customer. We'll be rolling it out soon."

The TMC measures "time to itinerary," the time from the customer's initial contact with an agent or login to an OBT to when they receive their trip plan. "Minimizing that is good for our business," said Cameron. He estimated that at least one-quarter of bookings were initiated by email.

Executive Travel measures revenue per full-time equivalent. It's a few weeks from implementing Front, and has implemented Amgine with more than 10 customers.

Executive CEO Paul Glenn said he thought there were significant questions about the future of online booking tools and global distribution systems. Four in five Executive clients use an OBT.

His concern does not extend to travel counselors. “Travel is personal, and you want someone there who cares,” said Glenn. “Every day has something new and different, whether it’s a storm, a virus or a military conflict. So people want to know someone has their back, and tech doesn’t give that to you.”

The Amgine-Front combo “positions us for the future,” said Glenn. “It’s making us more efficient. The challenge the industry faces is that it’s fairly [low margin](#). As those tighten up, if we can be more efficient, we’re not affected.”

Bid Logic Solutions founder Bryan Holmes echoed those thoughts during an AmTrav webinar this week. “TMCs are going to manage a reduction in [commissions](#) by managing their operating costs, and they’re going to do that through technology,” Holmes said. “We’re at a weird point right now. I think for a lot of TMCs, the challenge is getting agents. And then, almost overnight, when somebody solves the interaction model for AI — when the AI can execute orders on the booking side and manage that — then it’s going to be a sudden whiplash. We’re going to go from needing agents to nobody needing agents. Where that tipping point is and what happens is very unpredictable.”

At Travel Inc., about half of interactions between agents and customers are now by email, “and we plan to send as many emails

as possible through the Amgine process,” said head of product Eric Almond.

“It takes out all the slack in reading, parsing the email, searching and selling,” he said. “Then there’s the part where the system has to create the PNR and it goes through GDS validation. We removed 100 percent of the slack and wait time. When an agent first sees it, it has already gone through validation so it looks how we expect it to. Then it goes to the traveler with options, and they can build their trip.”

Almond said it was still to be determined how these changes alter [service level agreements](#) and how, if at all, they impact [client pricing](#).



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Amgine charges for each ticketed passenger name record. “The goal is to be competitively priced with online booking tools,” said Apple.

The company is working on new use cases, including [ticket changes](#). Previously called HelloGbye, Amgine is no longer an American Express Global Business Travel partner. GBT officials could not be reached for comment.

Incorporated in 2012, Amgine raised \$17 million since 2019 and now is seeking another \$8 million. Existing investors include a division of Susquehanna International Group and travel industry veterans Ellen Keszler and Terry Jones.